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To: Chief Executives of CMS constituent societies

9 December 2011

Future of the Mathematical Sciences in the UK

Many members of our Societies will be aware of the “Shaping Capability” initiative of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). Under this initiative the EPSRC has mapped the disciplines that it supports into 111 research areas¹ and plans to align funding with its assessment of UK strength and national importance. There has been considerable anxiety among members of the EPSRC’s research community about the rationale for this approach, the lack of consultation, and the threat to research excellence as the key criterion for EPSRC funding.

In October, the Royal Society² brought together the CMS with four other bodies (the Institute of Physics, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Royal Academy of Engineering and the Institution of Engineering and Technology) to discuss these concerns with John Armitt and David Delpy, the EPSRC Chair and Chief Executive respectively. Following the meeting, the letter³ from John Armitt and David Delpy to *Nature* on 7 November offered a clear statement that research excellence remains pre-eminent in assessing applications; but on other areas of concern there has been less progress.

An essential recommendation of the EPSRC’s 2010 International Review of Mathematical Sciences⁴ was the creation of a new structure, designed together by EPSRC and the mathematical sciences research community, to allow communication, in advance rather than after the fact, about the most effective structures for funding, the nature of initiatives and other key issues. During 2011 there has been a score of meetings between CMS and EPSRC at a variety of levels, but little real progress with this recommendation has been made. EPSRC’s decision to offer no postdoctoral fellowships over most of its mathematical sciences portfolio was taken with no consultation, and EPSRC recently reaffirmed this decision despite the clearly expressed views of the community, the learned societies, the International Review panel, and EPSRC’s Strategic Advisory Team.

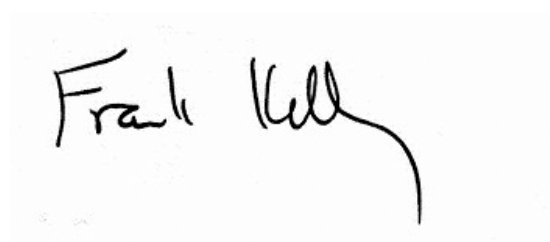
Both issues, the pre-eminence of research excellence and postdoctoral fellowships in the mathematical sciences, were discussed during the appearance of EPSRC’s Chair and Chief Executive before the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee on 29 November. The recording of the session⁵ is illuminating, but not encouraging.

CMS will continue to do its best to work constructively with the mathematical sciences programme team at EPSRC, and we are helping to identify members of the community who can offer informed views. At the same time we shall be pressing the case for the mathematical sciences in wider groupings, in parliament and elsewhere⁶.

Mathematics underpins our 21st century technology, economy and society, and this is recognised in the employment market, where the prospects for our graduates and postgraduates are amongst the best. The flow of trained mathematical scientists into other disciplines and into the industries of the future relies upon our universities' research and teaching excellence. The case for the mathematical sciences is strong, and we must make it.

If you would like to make this letter available to your members please feel free to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Frank Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

Professor Frank Kelly FRS,
Chair, Council for the Mathematical Sciences

Footnotes

1. EPSRC's 111 research areas: <http://gow.epsrc.ac.uk/NGBOListResearchAreas.aspx>
2. The meeting between EPSRC and the learned societies followed a joint letter: <http://royalsociety.org/news/epsrc-funding-strategy/>
3. The Nature letter: <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/press-release-documents/LetterRef9442-Nature.pdf>
4. The International Review of Mathematical Sciences: <http://www.epsrc.ac.uk/newsevents/pubs/corporate/intrevs/2010maths/Pages/default.aspx>
5. The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee session: <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/Player.aspx?meetingId=9580>
6. Details of other CMS activity can be found on its website: <http://www.cms.ac.uk>